

Red Light Running Cameras, is it time?

By Jay Anderson

A recent nationwide study of deadly crashes at traffic signals indicates that 22 percent failed to obey the signal. In 2006, the fatality rate approached 900 and 144,000 injuries were recorded, all a result of red light running (RLR). In many regions, since the 1980's violations have increased by more than 10 percent. Nearly half the deaths in RLR collisions are pedestrians and passengers in vehicles hit by the red light runner.

What is considered red light running?

The typical violation occurs when a motorist enters an intersection some time after the signal light turns red. The 2007 Florida Statutes, 316.075, Traffic Control Devices, addresses the steady yellow and steady red indicators used to determine RLR in Florida. There is a grey area regarding the yellow light but most law enforcement officers give the benefit of the doubt, unless a driver blatantly pulls into the intersection on a yellow signal.

How often does red light running occur?

On average, a motorist runs a red light every twenty minutes according to a study in Fairfax, Virginia conducted at five busy intersections. Red light running was more frequent during peak travel times. Data from four states (without RLR cameras) collected at 19 intersections found that in 554 hours, 1775 violations were recorded, which is 3.2 violations per hour per intersection.

Who are the violators?

A 2007 study in Sacramento, California calculated that approximately 30 percent of red light runners were under the age of thirty. Gender differences were insignificant between violators and operators who did not run red lights. Not surprising, as a group, red light runners were less likely to use seatbelts, drove smaller and older vehicles than drivers who obeyed traffic signals. Driving records

for red light runners indicate they are three times as likely to have multiple speeding convictions.

Are red light cameras the solution?

According to the Federal Highway Safety Administration automated red light enforcement using cameras has been proven to be effective in reducing the incidence of red light running and the number of RLR crashes. Currently twenty two states and one territory have either passed legislation or are considering legislation to enforce red light running utilizing camera technology. The **STOP** Red Light Running Coalition is leading the way for legislation in Florida. Some local communities are installing red light cameras based on passage of local ordinances. Pasco County recently began enforcement at a major intersection with a high crash rate, Collier County has also joined the effort and Lee County officials will be testing the cameras at one intersection. Red light cameras have gained widespread popularity in the past decade but have been around for more than 40 years.

Where's law enforcement?

Law enforcement agencies world-wide claim these red light running cameras are a great addition to their communities. Not only do they act as a deterrent against red light running, they also allow police agencies to track habitual offenders. Patrolling intersections as often as would be required to cite operators who run red lights is impossible, simply due to the availability of resources. Cameras provide the opportunity for officers to focus on other enforcement requests. The system works 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, catching violators and mailing out revenue-generating citations that are difficult to contest.

Does a longer yellow signal help?

Lee County, Florida, traffic engineers have adjusted the yellow signal timing at intersections that have a high incidence of red light running, and adjust other signals when data indicates a change is required. A study conducted in

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, evaluated incremental effects on red light running of first lengthening yellow signal timing, followed by the introduction of red light enforcement. Yellow signal timing was increased by one second at two intersections where cameras were installed. Results showed that while increased yellow signal timing reduced red light violations by 36 percent, the addition of red light camera enforcement further reduced red light violations at these sites by 96 percent beyond levels achieved by the longer yellow signal.

Won't red light cameras produce excessive revenue?

No. The cameras intention is to deter violators by encouraging them to alter their behavior, not cite them. Drivers are warned through the use of public awareness campaigns and signs that cameras are in use. Typically fines paid by drivers who continue to run red lights produce the income. Generally the programs do not produce excess revenue according to independent audits of photo enforcement. Officials from the Delaware Department of Transportation say the cameras (20 on state roads) brought in more than \$ 3 million in fines for 2007. Locally, one agency who could utilize the revenue is our Trauma Center. They deal with the victims of collisions on a daily basis, so directing the funds to the Trauma Center is a win-win for all our residents and visitors.

What does the public think of red light cameras?

Red light cameras have the support of a large majority of the U.S. public. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) nationwide survey conducted by the Gallup Organization in 2002 found that 75 percent of drivers favored the use of red light running cameras. At least two dozen U.S. cities use the cameras for law enforcement along with numerous smaller communities.

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